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# Walking Meditation

*Three Expositions*

*Ajahn Ñāṇadhammo,  
Ajahn Brahmavaṃso, and  
Dharma Dorje*



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## Three Expositions on Walking Meditation

by

**Ajahn Ñāṇadhammo,  
Ajahn Brahmavaṃso,  
and  
Dharma Dorje**

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## About the Essays

“Walking Meditation in the Thai Forest Tradition” by Ajahn Nyanadhammo was edited from two Dhamma talks given at Dhammaloka Buddhist Centre (31<sup>st</sup> of July, 1992) and Bodhinyana Forest Monastery (22<sup>nd</sup> of January 2002), Perth, Australia. It was published privately by Wat Pah Nanachat and is republished here with the kind permission of the author.

“Walking Meditation is Wonderful” by Ajahn Brahmavaṁso is an extract (pp. 74–78) from *Mindfulness, Bliss, and Beyond*, Boston, 2006, used with the permission of Wisdom Publications.

The essay “Walking Meditation Practices” by Dharma Dorje (Michael Bell) is first published here.

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## Discourses

Bhikkhus, there are these five benefits in walking meditation. What five? One endures long (walking) journeys. One endures striving (in meditation). One has little physical afflictions. What is eaten, drunk, chewed, tasted, is well digested. The concentration that has been attained by walking meditation lasts for a long time.

(AN 5:29)

“... Moggallāna, perceiving what is before and behind [1], you should fix attention on walking meditation, with the sense-faculties turned inward, and the mind not going out. ...”

(AN 7:58)

“Bhikkhus, you should train thus: ‘We will be devoted to wakefulness; by walking and sitting meditation during the day, ... night, we will purify our minds of obstructive states.’”

(MN 39.10)

I left my dwelling overcome by sleepiness. Going onto the walking path, I fell down on the earth.

Having rubbed my limbs and having gone onto the walking-meditation path again, I did walking meditation and became well composed in mind.

Then wise attention arose in me, the danger in existence became clear, disenchantment was established, and my mind was released.

(Bhagu Thera, Theragāthā 271–273)

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## Walking Meditation in the

# Thai Forest Tradition

By

**Ajahn Ñāṇadhammo**

This discourse addresses the how, when, where and why of walking meditation. It includes both practical instructions of the technical aspects of walking meditation and instructions for creating the quality of mind that leads to concentration, insight and wisdom through the physical activity of walking meditation.

The Buddha stressed developing mindfulness in the four main postures of the body: standing, sitting, lying down and walking. He exhorted us to be mindful in all these postures, to create a clear awareness and recollection of what we are doing while we are in any particular posture.

Walking meditation is called *caṅkama* in Pali. If you read about the lives of the monks and nuns at the time of the Buddha, you will see that many obtained the stages of Enlightenment while on the walking meditation path.

Walking meditation is an activity in which one can focus and concentrate the mind or develop investigative knowledge and wisdom.

Some people find that they are naturally drawn to walking meditation because they find it easier and more natural than sitting meditation. When they sit they feel dull, or tense, or they are easily distracted. Their mind doesn't calm down.

If this is the case with you, don't just persevere; try a change of posture or do something new. Experiment with standing meditation or try walking meditation. This new meditation posture may give you some other skilful means of applying the mind. All of the four postures of meditation are just techniques, methods for developing and training the mind. Try and develop walking meditation; you may start to see the benefits of it.

In the Forest Meditation Tradition in Northeast Thailand, there is a great emphasis on walking meditation. Many monks will walk for long hours as a way of developing concentration, sometimes as much as ten or fifteen hours a day!

The late Ajahn Singtong used to do so much walking meditation that he would make a rut in the walking path. The sandy path that he used for walking meditation would actually become hollow because he would walk so many hours in a day. Another monk, Ajahn Kum Dtun wouldn't bother to go into his hut at night. When he became really tired after walking in meditation all day and late into the night, he would lay down right there on the meditation path and use his fist as a pillow. He would go to sleep with mindfulness, having made a determination to get up the



moment he woke. As soon as he woke, he would start walking again. He basically lived on his walking meditation path! Ajahn Kum Dtun was quick to attain results in his practice.

In the West, there is not such an emphasis on the practice of walking meditation. Thus I would like to describe the process and recommend it to you to complement your sitting practice. I hope these instructions will help you develop your repertoire of meditative techniques—in both formal meditation and in your daily life. As so much of life is taken up with the activity of walking, if you know how to apply awareness to it then even simply walking about in your house can become a meditation exercise.

## **The Five Benefits of Walking Meditation**

The Buddha spoke of five benefits of walking meditation. In the order that he listed them in this Sutta (see frontispiece), they are as follows: walking meditation develops endurance for walking long distances; it is good for striving; it is healthy; it is good for the digestion after a meal, and the concentration won from walking meditation lasts a long time.

## **Developing Endurance for Walking Distances**

The first benefit of walking meditation is that it leads to endurance in walking distances. This was particularly important at the time of the Buddha when most people travelled by foot. The Buddha himself would regularly go

wandering from place to place, walking up to sixteen kilometres a day. So he recommended that walking meditation be used as a way of developing physical fitness and endurance for walking long distances.

Forest monks these days still go wandering; it is called *tudong* in Thai. They take their bowls and robes and walk, seeking out secluded places to meditate. In preparation for wandering, they progressively increase the amount of walking meditation so as to develop their physical fitness and endurance. They increase the number of hours of walking meditation a day to at least five or six hours.

### **Good for Striving**

Striving, especially to overcome drowsiness, is the second benefit. While practising sitting meditation, meditators may slip into tranquil states, but if they are “too tranquil,” they may start nodding off to sleep. Without mindfulness and awareness, meditation, even though it feels peaceful, can turn into dullness because it has been overcome by sloth and torpor. Doing walking meditation can counteract this tendency.

Ajahn Chah used to recommend us that once a week we stay up all night, sitting and doing walking meditation throughout the night. We tended to get very drowsy around one or two in the morning, so Ajahn Chah recommended we do the walking meditation backwards to overcome drowsiness. You don't fall asleep walking backwards!

Once at Bodhinyana Monastery in Western Australia, I went out early one morning, around five o'clock, to do some walking meditation and saw a layman, who was staying for the Rains Retreat in the monastery, doing walking meditation up and down along the top of the six-foot high wall in front of the monastery. By putting great effort into being mindful of each step, he was overcoming drowsiness by developing a heightened sense of alertness, effort and zeal.

### **Good for Health**

The Buddha said that walking meditation leads to good health. This is the third benefit. We are all aware that walking is considered a very good form of exercise. These days, we even hear of "power walking". Well, we are talking here about "power meditation," developing walking meditation as both a physical and mental exercise. But to get both benefits, we have to bring awareness to the process of walking, instead of just walking and letting the mind wander off thinking of other things.

### **Good for Digestion**

The fourth benefit of walking meditation is that it is good for the digestion. This is particularly important for monks who eat one meal a day. After a meal, the blood goes to the stomach and away from the brain. Thus one can feel drowsy. Forest monks stress that after a meal one should do a few hours of walking meditation, because walking up and down helps the digestion. For lay meditators too if you have

had a heavy meal, instead of going to bed, go out and do an hour of walking meditation. It will help with physical wellbeing and provide an opportunity to cultivate the mind.

## **Good for Sustaining Concentration**

The fifth important benefit of walking meditation is that the concentration arising out of walking meditation sustains itself for a long time. The walking posture is a relatively coarse or complex meditative posture compared to sitting. While sitting, it is easy to maintain one's posture. We have our eyes closed so there are no visual sense stimuli, and we are not engaged in any bodily movement. So sitting, in comparison to walking, is a simpler posture in terms of the activities involved. The same is true for standing and lying down, because there is no movement taking place.

If one has developed concentration only in the sitting posture, when one gets up from that position and begins with bodily movements like walking, it is harder to maintain that state of concentration. This is because one is moving from a refined state to a coarser state.

While we are walking there is much more sensory input. We are looking where we are going; thus there is visual input. There is also sensory input from the movement of the body. Therefore if we can concentrate the mind while walking and receiving all this sensory stimuli, then when we change from that posture to a simpler one, concentration becomes easier to maintain. That is, when we sit down the strength of mind and power of that concentration carries over easily to

this posture. So walking meditation can help to develop strength and clarity of mind, and a concentration that can carry over into other less active meditation postures.

## **Preparation for Walking Meditation**

### **Finding a Suitable Place**

The place where the Lord Buddha did walking meditation at Bodhgaya after his Enlightenment still exists to this day. His walking path was seventeen steps long. These days the Forest Monks tend to make their walking meditation paths much longer — up to thirty steps long. The beginner may find thirty paces too long because their mindfulness has not yet developed. By the time you come to the end of the path, your mind may have been “around the world and back.” Remember, walking is a stimulating posture, and initially the mind tends to wander a great deal. It is usually better for beginners to start off on a shorter path; fifteen paces would be a good length.

If you do a walk meditation outside, find a secluded place where you won't be distracted or disturbed. It is good to find a walking path that is slightly enclosed. It can be a distraction to walk in an open area where there is a view, as you may find that the mind is drawn out to the scenery. If the path is closed in, it tends to bring the mind inwards, into one's self and towards peace. An enclosed area is especially suitable for speculative personalities who like to think a lot; it helps to calm their minds. [2]

## Preparing the Body and Mind

Once you have chosen a suitable path, stand at one end. Stand erect. Put the right hand over the left in front of you. Don't walk with your hands behind your back. A meditation master who visited the monastery where I was staying once commented when he saw one of the guests walking up and down with his hands behind his back: "He's not walking meditation; he's going for a stroll." By placing the hands in front, it creates a clear determination to focus the mind on walking meditation, to differentiate from "just walking."

The practice is firstly to develop *samādhi*, a Pali word that means focussing the mind, developing the mind to one-pointedness by gradual degrees of mindfulness and concentration. To focus the mind, one has to be diligent and determined. This requires a degree of physical as well as mental composure. One begins by composing oneself by clasping the hands in front. Composing the body helps to compose the mind. Having thus composed the body, one should then stand still and bring awareness and attention to the body. Then raise your hands together in *añjali*, a gesture of respect, and with your eyes shut reflect for a few minutes on the qualities of the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Saṅgha (*buddhānussati*, *dhammānussati* and *saṅghānussati*).

Contemplate having taken refuge in the Buddha, the Wise One, He who Knows and Sees, the Awakened One, the Fully Enlightened One. Reflect in your heart on the qualities

of the Buddha for a few minutes. Then recall the Dhamma—the Truth that you are striving to realise on the walking meditation path. Finally, bring to mind the Saṅgha, especially those fully Enlightened Ones who have realised the Truth by cultivating meditation.

Then bring the hands down in front of you and make a mental determination on how long you are going to “walk meditation”, be it half an hour, one hour, or more. However long you determine to walk for, adhere to it. In this manner you are nurturing the mind at that initial stage of the meditation with zest, inspiration and confidence.

## **Meditation Objects for Walking Meditation**

The Buddha taught forty different meditation objects, <sup>[3]</sup> many of which can be used on the walking path. However some are more suitable than others. I shall discuss a number of these meditation objects here, beginning with those most commonly used.

### **Awareness of the Walking Posture**

The first method is awareness of the walking posture. While walking, place all your attention at the soles of the feet, on the sensations and feelings as they arise and pass away. As you walk, the feeling will change. As the foot is lifted and comes down again into contact with the path, a new feeling arises. Be aware of this sensation on the sole of the foot. Again as the foot lifts, mentally note the new feeling as it

arises. When you lift each foot and place it down, know the sensations felt. At each new step, certain new feelings are experienced and old feelings cease. These should be known with mindfulness. With each step there is a new feeling experienced—feeling arising, feeling passing away; feeling arising, feeling passing away.

With this method, we place mindfulness on the feeling of walking itself, on each step taken, on the *vedanā* (pleasant, unpleasant or neutral sensations). We are aware of whatever type of *vedanā* arises at the soles of the feet. When we stand, there is a sensation, a feeling, of the contact with the ground. This contact can produce pain, heat or other sensations. We place our mindful attention on those feelings, knowing them fully. When raising the foot to take a step, the feeling changes as soon as the foot loses contact with the ground. When we place that foot down, again a new feeling arises as the foot comes into contact with the ground. As we walk, feelings are constantly changing and arising anew. We mindfully note this arising and passing away of feelings as the soles of the feet lift off or touch onto the ground. In this way we are keeping our full attention just on the sensations that arise through walking.

Have you ever really noticed before the feelings in the feet as you walk? They happen every time we walk, but we tend not to notice these subtle things in life. When we walk, our minds tend to be somewhere else. Walking meditation is a way of simplifying what we are doing when we are doing it. We are bringing the mind to the “here and now,” being



“one with walking when walking”. We are simplifying everything, quieting the mind by just knowing feeling as it is arising and passing away.

It is important to remember when walking to keep the eyes cast down about a metre and a half in front. Don't be looking around distracted by this or that. Keep awareness on the feeling at the soles of the feet, and in this way, develop focussed attention, and clear knowing of walking while walking.

How fast should you walk? Ajahn Chah recommended walking naturally, not too slow or too fast. If you walk fast, you might find it very difficult to concentrate on the sensation of feeling arising and passing away. You may need to slow down. On the other hand, some people may need to speed up. You have to find your own pace, whatever works for you. You can begin slowly at first then gradually come to your normal walking pace.

If your mindfulness is weak (meaning your mind wanders a lot), then walk very slowly until you can stay in the present moment of each step. Start by establishing mindfulness at the beginning of the path. When you arrive in the middle of the path, then mentally ask yourself, “Where is my mind? Is it on the feeling at the soles of the feet? Am I knowing the contact here and now, at this present moment?” If the mind has wandered off, then bring it back to the sensations at the feet again and continue walking.

When you get to the end of the path, turn slowly around

and re-establish your mindfulness. Where is the mind? Has it wandered off? Does it know the feeling at the soles of the feet? The mind tends to wander elsewhere chasing thoughts of: anxiety, fear, happiness, sorrow, worries, doubts, pleasures, frustrations and all the other myriad thoughts that can possibly arise. If mindfulness of the meditation object is not present, re-establish the mind on the simple act of walking, and then begin to walk back to the other end of the path.

When you get to the middle of the path, again note, "I am now at the middle of the path" and check to see if the mind is with the object. Then, once you arrive at the end of the path mentally note, "Where is the mind?" In this way, you walk back and forth mindfully aware of the feelings arising and passing away. While walking, constantly re-establish your mindfulness pulling the mind back, drawing the mind inward, becoming aware, knowing the feeling at each moment as it is arising and passing away.

As you sustain mindfulness on the sensations and feelings at the soles of the feet, you will notice that the mind gets less distracted. The mind becomes less inclined to go out to things that are happening around you. You become calmer. The mind becomes tranquil as it settles down. Once the mind is calm and tranquil, then you'll find that walking becomes too coarse an activity for this quality of mind. You will just want to be still. So stop and stand to allow the mind to experience this calm and tranquillity.

Walking involves the mental volition to move, and your mind may be too focused on the meditation object to move. Continue the practice in a standing position. Meditation is about the work of the mind, not about any particular posture. The physical posture is just a convenient means to enhance the work of the mind.

This calmness and tranquillity is known as *passaddhi*; it is one of the factors of Enlightenment. Concentration and tranquillity work together with mindfulness; combined with the factors of energy, investigation of Dhamma, joy, and equanimity, they make up the “Seven Factors of Enlightenment.” When in meditation the mind is tranquil, then because of that tranquillity there will arise a sense of joy, rapture, and bliss. The Buddha said that the bliss of peace is the highest happiness. A concentrated mind experiences that peace, and this peace can be experienced in our lives.

Having developed the practice of walking meditation in a formal context, then when we are walking around in our daily lives going to the shops, walking from one room to the other, we can use this activity of walking as meditation. We can be aware just of walking, simply being with that process. Our minds can be still and peaceful. This is a way of developing concentration and tranquillity in our daily lives.

## **From Sitting Meditation to the Walking Path**

If while doing sitting meditation, the mind becomes tranquil

with a certain meditation object, then you can use that same object in walking meditation. However with some subtle meditation objects, such as the breath, the mind must have attained a certain degree of stability in that calmness first. If the mind is not yet calm and you begin walking meditation focusing attention on the breath, it will be difficult, as the breath is a very subtle object. It is generally better to begin with a coarser object of meditation, such as the sensations of feelings arising at the feet.

There are many meditation objects that do transfer well from the sitting to the walking posture: for example the Four Divine Abidings: Loving kindness, Compassion, Appreciative Joy and Equanimity. As you pace back and forth develop the expansive thoughts based on loving kindness, “May all beings be happy, may all beings be at peace, may all beings be free from all suffering.” You can use the walking posture as a complement to sitting, developing meditation on the same object but in a different posture.

## **Choosing a Mantra**

If while walking meditation you find that you are getting drowsy, then activate the mind, rather than calm it, with a mantra so that it becomes more focussed and awake. Use a mantra like *Buddho*, repeating the word quietly to yourself over and over again. If the mind still wanders, then start saying *Buddho* very quickly, and walk up and down very fast. As you walk, recite *Buddho, Buddho, Buddho*. In this

way, your mind can become focussed very quickly.

Let me tell you a story that illustrates the effectiveness of a mantra. When Tan Ajahn Mun, the famous forest meditation teacher, was dwelling in North Thailand, the hill tribes in the area knew nothing about meditation or meditation monks. However the hill tribe people are very inquisitive. When they saw him walking up and down on his path, they followed him in a line. When he turned around at the end of the path, the whole village was standing there.

They had noticed him walking back and forth with his eyes cast down and had assumed he was searching for something. They enquired, "What are you looking for, Venerable Sir? Can we help you find it?" He skilfully replied, "I'm looking for Buddhho, the Buddha in the heart. You can help me to find it by walking up and down on your own paths looking for the Buddha." With this simple and beautiful instruction, many of those villagers began meditating, and Tan Ajahn Mun said they obtained wonderful results.

## **Contemplation of the Way Things Are**

Investigation of Dhamma (*dhammavicaya*) is one of the Factors of Enlightenment. Contemplating the teachings and the laws of nature can be employed while walking up and down the meditation path. This does not mean that one thinks or speculates randomly. Rather, it is the constant reflection and contemplation of the Truth , the Dhamma.

## **Investigating Impermanence**

For example, one can contemplate Impermanence by observing the process of change, and seeing how all things are subject to change. One develops a clear perception of the arising and passing away of all experience. “Life” is a continual process of arising and passing away, and all conditioned experience is subject to this law of nature. By contemplation of this Truth, one sees the characteristics of existence. One sees that all things are subject to change. All things are not satisfactory. All things are not self. One can investigate these fundamental characteristics of nature on the walking meditation path.

## **Recollecting Generosity and Virtue**

The Buddha continually stressed the importance of generosity and virtue. While on the walking path, one can reflect on one’s virtue or on acts of generosity. Walk up and down and ask yourself, “Today, what acts of goodness have I done?”

A meditation teacher I knew often used to comment that one reason meditators cannot get peaceful is because they have not done enough goodness during the day. Goodness is a cushion for tranquillity, a base for peace. If we have done acts of kindness during the day—having said a kind word, done a good deed, been generous or compassionate—then the mind will experience joy and rapture. Those acts of goodness, and the happiness that comes from them, will become the conditional factors for concentration and peace.

The powers of goodness and generosity lead to happiness and it is that wholesome happiness which forms the foundation for concentration and wisdom.

The recollection of one's good deeds is a very appropriate meditation subject when the mind is restless, agitated, angry, or frustrated. If the mind lacks peace, then recollect your past kind actions. This is not to for the purpose of building up your ego, but a recognition of the power of goodness and wholesomeness. Acts of kindness, virtue and generosity bring joy (*pīti*) into the mind, and joy is a Factor of Enlightenment (*bojjhaṅga*).

Recollecting acts of generosity; reflecting on the benefits of giving; recalling one's virtue; contemplating the purity of harmlessness, the purity of honesty, the purity of propriety in sexual relations, the purity of truthfulness, the purity of non-confusion of mind by avoiding intoxicants—all of these recollections can serve as meditation objects on the walking path.

## **Recollecting the Nature of the Body**

We can also meditate on death and dying, or on the non-beautiful nature of the body, or on the *asubha* contemplations—corpses in various stages of decay. We can visualise taking this body apart, just as a medical student would dissect a body. We “peel off the skin and see” what is underneath, the layers of the flesh, the sinews, the bones, the organs. We can mentally remove each one of the organs from the body so it can be investigated and understood.

What is the body made of? What are its component parts? Is this me? Is it permanent? Is it worthy of being called a self?

The body is just an aspect of nature, like a tree or a cloud. The fundamental problem is the attachment to the body; where the mind clings to the view that this body is my body, clings to delights in my body, clings to delights in other people's bodies: "This is me. This is self. I own this."

We can challenge this attachment to the body through contemplation and investigation. For example, we can take up the object of the bones of the body; visualise a specific bone as we are walking meditation, seeing it bleach, break up and return to the earth element. Bone is made up of calcium and other chemicals, absorbed into the body through the consumption of vegetable and animal matter. It comes from earth. Chemicals from the earth come together to form bone, and eventually that bone will return to earth.

We meditate on and break down a bone to its elements and return them back to the earth. We re-establish it again and break it down again, and we carry on this process continuously until clear insight arises. Calcium just is calcium; there is no quality of it being my calcium or someone else's. Earth just goes back to earth, each element returns to its natural form. This is not me; this is not mine; this is not worthy of being called a self.

If you are meditating on the parts of the body and you have not completely broken down the object of meditation into the four elements (earth, air, fire and water) and then re-



constituted it, the work of the meditation is not yet finished. The mental exercise is not yet complete; the work is not done. Keep at it. Continue walking. Walk up and down and investigate until you are able to establish the perception in the mind of seeing the *asubha* in the *subha*—to see the non-beautiful, the non-delightful, and the non-attractive in what is assumed to be beautiful, delightful and attractive. We break this body down and turn it back to its natural elements, in order to see it as it really is.

The training of the mind to investigate natural processes leads to wisdom. By repeating these exercises, the mind sees and understands that this is not me, not mine, not self. It sees that the four elements that constitute this body are just aspects of nature. It is the mind that attaches to the view that the body is self. We come to challenge that attachment; we do not accept it blindly, because it is that attachment which causes all our suffering.

## **Other Contemplations**

Another meditation object the Buddha recommended was to reflect on peace, and the nature of peace. [4] Yet another is to consider the qualities of Enlightenment. Alternatively one can walk up and down reflecting on the qualities of the Buddha, the qualities of the Dhamma, or the qualities of the Saṅgha. Or one can recollect heavenly beings (*devas*) and the qualities needed to become a heavenly being. [5]

## **Wise Use of Contemplation**

There are so many meditation objects in the Buddhist repertoire of meditation. Your meditation object should be chosen carefully. Select a meditation object that stimulates the mind when the mind needs stimulating, or pacifies the mind when the mind needs calming. But a few words of caution are needed when using these contemplations on the walking path. It is very easy for the mind to drift into speculative thought. We have to be very mindful, and to note at the beginning of the path, the middle and the end of the path: “Am I really with my meditation object or am I thinking about something else?” If you are walking up and down on a meditation path for four hours, but there is only mindful awareness for one minute during the four hours, you have meditated for only one minute.

We need to remember it is not how much meditation we do; it is the quality of that meditation that counts. If, while you are walking, the mind is wandering off elsewhere, then you are not meditating in the sense that the Buddha used the word meditation; as *bhāvanā* or mental development. It is the quality of mind rather than the quantity of meditation which is important.

## Conclusion

Throughout the history of Buddhism, monks and nuns have attained insight, wisdom and Enlightenment while on the walking meditation path and practising investigation of the Truth. In the forest monastic tradition, every aspect of our

life is treated as an opportunity for meditation. Meditation is not just when seated on our meditation cushions. All the processes of life are opportunities for us to investigate reality. We strive to know things as they are, that things arise and pass away, to understand reality as it actually is.

In this discussion of walking meditation, I hope I have given you something that will extend your repertoire of meditation techniques. Walking meditation is something you can use in your daily life when you are active, as well as when you are doing formal meditation. It is another mode for developing the mind. Walking meditation gives work for the mind to do. If you have problems with drowsiness when sitting, get up and put the mind to work. This is *kammaṭṭhāna*, the fundamental work of the mind.

In the forest tradition whenever a meditation teacher goes to a monastery, one of the first places he goes to are the monks' meditation paths to see how many footprints are on them. And if those meditation paths are well worn, then that is considered a sign of a good monastery. May your walking path be well worn.

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## **Walking Meditation is Wonderful**

By

## Ajahn Brahmavaṃso

Walking meditation is wonderful, especially in the early morning. Often when you get up early in the morning, in particular when you're not used to getting up so early, you're quite tired and the mind isn't bright. One of the advantages of walking meditation is that you can't nod off while you're walking. So if you're tired, walking meditation is very good to do. It brings up some energy, and also you can get very peaceful.

Walking meditation was both praised and practised by the Buddha. If you read the suttas, you find that the Buddha would usually do walking meditation in the early morning. He wouldn't be sitting; he'd be walking.

Many monks and nuns have become enlightened on the walking meditation path. It's a very effective way of developing both calm and insight. For some monks that I know in Thailand, their main practice is walking meditation. They do very little sitting. They do a lot of walking, and many get tremendously powerful insights while they're walking.

Another benefit of walking meditation is that it is especially suitable for those who have physical discomfort when

sitting for long periods. If you find it difficult to sit in meditation because of pains in the body, walking meditation can be a very effective alternative.

Don't consider walking meditation as a "second-class" meditation. If you want to spend most of your meditation time this way, please do so. But do it well and do it carefully. See if you can develop the happiness born of serenity as you're walking back and forth.

## **Setting Up Walking Meditation**

Choose a clear, straight path between twenty to thirty paces long. This can be a corridor in a house, a path in the garden, or just a track on the grass. Use whatever is available, even if it's a bit less than twenty paces long. If it's comfortable to do so, walk without shoes, enjoying the contact of your bare feet on the ground.

Stand at one end of your path. Compose the mind. Relax the body and begin walking. Walk back and forth at a pace that seems natural to you. While you are walking, clasp your hands comfortably in front of you, and rest your gaze on the ground about two metres ahead. Be careful not to look around. If you're doing walking meditation, it's a waste of time to look here and there, because that would be distracting.

## **The Stages of Meditation Apply Here Too**

The first four stages of breath meditation apply here as well. But in walking meditation attention eventually comes to rest

on the feet rather than the breath.

At first, aim to develop the first stage of present-moment awareness, giving up the baggage of the past and future. Reach the state of just walking, easily, in the here and now. When you feel that you have settled into the present moment, where thoughts concerning the past and future are absent from the mind, then aim to develop the second stage of silent walking in the present moment. Gradually let go of all thinking, let go of the inner commentary. Walk without any inner speech. Develop silent awareness of the present-moment. Make use of techniques such as watching every moment very closely, so that you don't have the time to comment about what has just happened, and attending to the space between thoughts.

Once the inner commentary has slowed to a bare trickle of inner speech, deliberately focus your attention on the feeling of movement in the feet and lower legs. Do so to the extent that you clearly notice every step on the path. Know every left step, know every right step—one after the other without missing any. Know every step as you turn around at the end of the path. The famous Chinese saying that the “journey of one thousand miles begins with a single step” is helpful here. Such a journey is in fact only one step long—the step that you are walking now. So just be silently aware of this “one step,” and let everything else go. When you have completed ten return trips up and down the path without missing a single left or right step, then you have fulfilled the third stage of the walking meditation—silent

present-moment awareness of walking.

Now increase the attention so that you notice every feeling of movement in the left step, from the very beginning when the left foot starts to move and lift up from the ground.

Notice as it goes up, forward, down, and then rests on the ground again, taking the weight of the body. Develop this continuous awareness of the left step, and then similar smooth, unbroken awareness of the right step. Do this throughout every step to the end of the path. And as you turn around, notice every feeling in the turning—around procedure, not missing a movement.

When you can walk for fifteen minutes comfortably sustaining the attention on every moment of walking, without a single break, then you have reached the fourth stage of full sustained awareness of walking. At this point the process of walking so fully occupies the attention that the mind cannot be distracted. You know when this happens, because the mind goes into a state of *samādhi*, or attentive stillness, and becomes very peaceful.

## **Samādhi on the Walking Path**

Even the sound of the birds disappears as your attention is fully focused on the experience of walking. Your attention is easily settled, content, and sustained on one thing. You will find this a very pleasant experience indeed.

As your mindfulness increases, you will know more and more of the sensations of walking. Then you find that

walking does have this sense of beauty and peace to it. Every step becomes a “beautiful step.” And it can very easily absorb all your attention as you become fascinated by just walking. You can receive a great deal of samādhi through walking meditation in this way. That samādhi is experienced as peacefulness, a sense of stillness, a sense of the mind being very comfortable and very happy in its own corner.

I started my walking meditation practice when I was first ordained as a monk in a temple in Bangkok. I would choose a path and quite naturally, without forcing it, I’d walk very slowly. (You don’t need to walk fast, and you don’t need to walk slowly. Just do what feels comfortable.) I used to get into beautiful samādhi states during walking meditation. I recall once being disturbed because I’d been walking too long. I hadn’t noticed the time pass, and I was needed to go to an important ceremony. One of the monks had been sent to get me. I recall this monk came up to me and said, “Brahmavaṃso, you’ve got to come to a *dāna*” (an alms offering). I was looking at a space about two metres ahead. My hands were clasped in front of me. When I heard the monk’s voice, it seemed as if it came from a thousand miles away because I was so absorbed into my walking meditation. He repeated, “Brahmavaṃso, you have to come now!” It took me more than a minute to actually lift my gaze from the ground and to turn it around to the side where this senior monk was trying to get my attention. And as I met his eyes, all I could say was “What?” It took such a



long time to get out of that samādhi and react at normal speed. The mind was so cool and so peaceful and so still.

I hope you experience this peacefulness for yourself when you try walking meditation. Many people who practise walking meditation for the first time say, “This is amazing. Beautiful.” Just slowing down gives you a sense of peace. You become calm just by watching the sensations as you walk. So walking meditation is a type of meditation that I suggest you experiment with.

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# Walking Meditation Practices

by

**Dharma Dorje**

Walking is one of the most adaptable and readily practised meditations found in Buddhism. As one of four postures the Buddha prescribed for the development of mindfulness, [6] walking is a powerful tool used in meditation retreats for establishing mindfulness and for developing energy. It

produces and maintains awareness, which in turn helps control fluctuating mind states, even outside of secluded retreats. This paper offers ways to adapt walking as an extension of meditation practice both inside and outside of formal meditation retreats.

All the three main schools of Buddhism [7] use walking as a part of meditation or as a meditation practice. In Theravādin Buddhism a distinction is made between practices that develop “Insight” and “Tranquillity.” These two terms, synonymous with wisdom and mental discipline, have a synergistic relationship when it comes to realising Nibbāna [8]. Walking outside of meditation retreats, as presented here, mainly falls under the category of Tranquillity with minor development of Insight. On the other hand, walking within meditation retreats utilises either one or both practices depending upon individual requirements or the aim of the retreat. The goal of this paper is clarification of these two kinds of walking practices and when they should be done.

## **Attitudes and Perceptions**

Using walking in meditation retreats as a way to increase awareness is often a meditator’s first exposure to the benefits to be derived from this practice. Beginners often don’t realise just how much walking during retreats can be an integral part of the whole practice. It’s not uncommon to hear beginners express views indicating they do not perceive any benefit from the walking other than a break

from the sitting practice; that it is little more than a way to stretch and loosen legs and body. They can even develop attachment to walking as a relief or a break from what they see as the formal practice. To the other extreme, some see the periods of walking as getting in the way of the “real” work done while sitting. These meditators end up developing aversion instead of attachment towards the walking. Neither perception is correct and such attitudes need changing if one wants to get the maximum benefit out of meditation exercises. Walking meditation is not a separate practice, but a continuation of the practice in a different posture.

Walking is something that most of us do quite a bit outside of our meditation retreats. As such, mindfulness of the process of walking is a way to carry our meditation practice into our daily lives and thereby derive maximum potential from the exercise. As a daily practice, walking can be adapted so that it is both physically invigorating and mentally tranquillising, which helps to alleviate the strain and stress so many of us experience in day-to-day existence. When used in this way, it’s a relief, a break from the daily grind, something quite positive and useful to our well-being. Continued practice will increase mindfulness and act as groundwork or preparation for a retreat. Finding time to go on retreat is often difficult for the laity, and sometimes even for ordained monks and nuns, which makes the limited time within retreat quite precious. So anything that can be done to get us closer to the meditative state of mind

prior to a planned retreat is very valuable indeed.

## **Walking by Itself**

Let us start with walking practices not directly connected to sitting practices or retreats. The practices in this section can be used as preliminary work towards going on retreat as well as a daily or anytime practice (meaning that the practice can be done whenever or wherever the opportunity arises). Many of them are adapted from Thich Nhat Hanh's *The Long Road Turns To Joy: A Guide to Walking Meditation*, and I encourage you to read his book, referenced at the end of this paper.

There is a thread or general theme to the following exercises: "Let go and be here now." It is a simple instruction which is hard to do at the beginning. So many of us are too caught up in multi-tasking that we see neither the need nor the benefit to simplifying everyday activities. There is an adage that goes, "It is hard to remember to drain the swamp when you are up to your armpits in alligators." Whenever we start our practice, we bring along a myriad of thoughts concerning our worries, plans, hopes, fears, etc. No matter what thoughts arise while doing walking meditation the correct practice is to simply let go of them. You bring your mind back as soon as you become aware that your attention has wandered away from walking. This should be done without any further contemplation about their content. Regardless of how many times extraneous thoughts arise, just keep letting go of them until you have

finished the time set aside to do the walking meditation. You will probably notice thinking is much clearer and more lucid after your walking meditation than before you started.

There are a number of aids which can help you let go and be here now while walking; some are presented in the following paragraphs but the list is by no means exhaustive. Once you have mastered the techniques, feel free to develop some of your own. Although several of these methods can be combined, do not attempt this until you are comfortable doing only one. When you feel ready, go ahead and combine, but take a moment every time you decide to do your walking meditation to ascertain what your capabilities are at that moment. There are a number of factors to consider, such as how energised you feel, what is suitable for the environment in which you walk, the amount of time you have to pull the different methods together, etc. To cover these factors in detail would require quite a few pages and take away from the self-discovery aspect that is so important in Buddhist meditation techniques. Only through mindful repetition and reviewing will you learn what works best. This is a way to practise “clear comprehension” early on; an aspect of mindfulness that is just as important as “bare attention” which is the other aspect of mindfulness in Buddhist meditation. [9]

To be mindful when walking is to be Buddha-like. Take a moment to reflect on how the Buddha is often portrayed. Many Buddha images and paintings show the Buddha with a half smile on his face. This half smile comes naturally to

one who is happy and satisfied with being here now. Try to find this state of happiness and satisfaction before you take your first step and smile like a Buddha. The more you let go of extraneous thinking (meaning all thoughts and feelings not associated with the practice), the easier it will be to smile in this way.

Once you have established the Buddha Smile, bring your attention to your feet and start to walk. Be aware of the entire bodily action required to walk. Watch as your foot leaves the ground, remain aware of it as it moves through the air, as it touches the ground, and be aware of the way your body shifts the weight to the now-placed foot as you begin the next step. Try not to break the sequence into parts, but instead try to watch it as a fluid ongoing motion. Do not strain the mind or attempt to hold it on the feet. When you become aware the mind is not attuned to the feet, simply stop thinking about whatever has replaced your attention and return to the feet. Do not fret or be concerned about how many times you have to do this. Your focus will get better the more you practise walking meditation. If you give in to getting concerned or become upset about how poorly you maintain your awareness you will only increase extraneous thinking, which is exactly the opposite of what you are striving to do. **[10]** Just keep letting go and being here now at the feet.

If you become aware that your smile has gone then simply bring it back and then return to your feet. If you have to turn, simply be aware as much as you can of the process

involved. Again, keep it fluid as much as possible without breaking up the motion. The pace should be just slow enough to be able to watch it all, but not so slow as to make the walk broken or hesitant in any way. Refrain from talking, humming, whistling, or looking around beyond the necessary distance to maintain the direction of your travel.

As you walk in this fashion you will get to the point your mind is filled with all aspects of walking and less and less with mental “stuff” unrelated to walking. **[11]** You may even start to catch the wandering mind at the point of intention to leave the object and thereby not lose the awareness of the walking. Intention precedes all action, including the mental movement to another thought or to investigate another object of the physical senses. **[12]** Catching the intention to do something else marks an increase in mindfulness and indicates you are doing well with the practice.

Once you become comfortable with simply walking, increase your awareness to include breathing. This will be an easy transition for those of you who have already been practising preliminary exercises for Mindfulness of Breathing. A recommended method to link the breath to the walk is to count the steps taken during each in-breath and each out-breath. You start by making a mental note of the number of steps you have taken for each in- and out-breath while walking. Simply count 1–2–3 or 5–10–15–20. **[13]** Each number coincides with a full step and the duration of the count coincides with a full in-breath. Another count coincides with a full out-breath.

The number of steps for each breath may be different; for example, the count may be 2–3, meaning 2 steps for the in-breath and 3 steps for the out-breath. Do not concern yourself with the discrepancy and be prepared to change the count as you become more comfortable with the exercise or to compensate for changes in terrain you encounter. You can slow down or slightly increase your walking pace as an adjustment when the count and step are not coinciding, but *do not* try to speed up or slow down the breathing. It is very important to let the breathing happen at the rate the body sets. Controlling your breath can tire you quickly. **[14]** Physically straining in this way is counterproductive, leading to undesirable mind-states such as worry or agitation. On the other hand, slowing or slightly increasing the number of steps will lead to more relaxed physical and mental states which help bring forward tranquillity. Find the rhythm between smiling, walking, counting, and breathing. Let the practice develop naturally without strain and you will find yourself walking in this way spontaneously whenever and wherever it can be done.

## **Enhancing the Practice**

Before discussing other ways of practising walking meditation, let's take a small excursion into ways you can combine breathing and movement to increase mindfulness and tranquillity. These examples may seem a bit off topic, but I am including them to show that mindful use of breathing may be used with a broad range of activities besides just walking to gain beneficial results. Mental



exertion will be better if preceded by even a single mindful breath. [15] Weightlifters know you have to exhale when exerting or you can injure yourself. I recall one person telling me how she got into the flow of relaxed mindful breathing while scuba diving. She found that by slightly increasing the amount of air she breathed in, she could rise in the water to clear coral and rocks in her path. Breathing with awareness and not working the legs so much led to less breathing overall. So much so, that when she returned to the boat with the other divers, the impressed instructor pointed out there was a considerably more oxygen left in her tank when compared with the other divers' tanks.

Hatha yoga provides excellent ways to use the breath while doing stretching and exercising. Some of the exercises require you to do them with an inhale or exhale of breath, while some require using both the in and the out breath in one exercise (e.g., Sun Salutations). The length of time to hold a pose, or *Āsana*, can utilise a breath count.

The same method prescribed in the previous section of combining counting with breathing can be adapted to running, or fast walking, or any repetitive exercise as another way of extending the practice into other activities. In Tai Chi an alternative method called Guo Lin Qigong has been prescribed as a complementary treatment for cancer patients. The method combines tight control of gaze, arm movements, state of mind, and also involves altering the pattern of in-and-out breathing for a specific number of steps to achieve increased vigour while simultaneously

increasing concentration. [16]

My teacher, Kema Ananda, recommended another variation for running and cross-country skiing in which you say a mantra just under your breath. The syllables of the mantra act in the same manner as the numbers. He pointed out there was a bonus with this practice because you could only maintain recitation while doing these activities if you weren't overdoing the physical exertion. The mantra was acting like a heart monitor to warn you when you were pushing the activity too far. And let us not forget that some mantras increase wholesome mind states like loving kindness. This is extremely beneficial multi-tasking once you develop the skill.

The use of a mantra or a phrase in walking meditation to tie the breath and walk together does require some extra consideration. You should make the syllables in the phrase match the length and rhythm of the breath and steps respectively. But the phrase or mantra can span both the in-breath and the out-breath. As an example, let us use the Thai Buddhist mantra "*Namo Buddhāya, Namō Dhammāya, Namō Saṅghāya*" (Translation: "*Homage to the Buddha, Homage to the Dharma, Homage to the Saṅgha*"). [17] The entire mantra has a word count of 6 or a syllable count of 15. You could say 2 words on the in-breath and 2 words on the out-breath and 2 words on the in-breath to complete the mantra. Alternatively, you could divide the Mantra across three sets of in- and out-breaths using 5 syllables for each of the three segments: "*Namo*" for the first in-breath, "*Buddhāya*" for the

out-breath, “*Namo*” for the second in-breath, and “*Dhammāya*” for the second out-breath and finally “*Namo*” for the last in-breath and “*Saṅghāya*” for the last out-breath.

I personally find varying the speed of parts of a mantra to work quite smoothly: “*Namo*” slowed for one in-breath and a much quicker recitation of “*Buddhāya*” for the out breath. I am very comfortable with a short inhale and a much longer exhale when doing breath meditation and walking. This is why this method works so well for me. I even use this matching of breath, mantra, and movement while I am exercising on a rowing machine (similar to the running with the mantra described above). Each person will need to determine what works for them when expanding their practice. But above all do not fool around with controlling the breath until you are experienced and have good reason to alter its naturally occurring state of flow. [18]

Another alternative is to form sentences which fit your breath-count. “I smile like a Buddha” fits a 3–3 count, but changing it to “I walk and smile like a Buddha” fits a 4–4 count or “May I smile like a Buddha” fits a 3–4 count. Choose a sentence that aligns you to a wholesome idea. [19] A mettā mantra in English such as “May all beings be happy and free from suffering!” is another example, but the syllable count and word count are an odd number which makes coordination between in- and out-breath more challenging. The challenge however provides the added benefit of greater concentration and more awareness being generated. The benefit is achieved because the exercise

becomes more resistant to “running on automatic”. [20]

## Further Guidelines

If something outside of walking practice requires your attention, then stop the practice momentarily. Do what you need to in order to deal with the situation and then return to the walking meditation. You don't have to be impolite to someone who sees your smiling face and says “Good morning”, but you also do not have to do more than reply in the same fashion with mindfulness before returning to the practice. If they persist in an attempt to engage in conversation then politely excuse yourself before returning to practise.

Something very positive may present itself and seem worthy of your attention, such as the beauty of morning dew coating a field of grass or a single exquisite flower encountered on your path. Don't ignore such pleasant mind objects or the wholesome mind states that arise in conjunction with them. Instead, mindfully let them go and return to your walking. [21]

One final point deserves mention. As you develop this way of walking you will find that combining all the elements of smiling, walking, counting and breathing will seem to take all your attention, and that it is easy to maintain the mindfulness because the mind is so fully occupied. Such a state will not last long, as the mind is very good at programming behavioural patterns (think about how much can be on your mind when driving a car). Once you

establish the practice, boredom arises and the mind will divert its attention and seem to dart around to all kinds of other objects and thoughts. This is simply craving for new stimulation. See it as an opportunity to not respond. Not answering craving when it arises is the first step to undoing or reprogramming conditioned patterns of unwholesome behaviour. Your aim is to let go of whatever arises which is not part of this practice and return to only this practice until the time you allotted for it is over. Do not combat the boredom by changing the phrase or method of practice. The next time you walk you can change something then, but always finish what you start or you risk developing unprofitable habits which will plague you throughout your spiritual development.

## **Walking Between Sits during Retreats**

All sitting practices require mindfulness to do them as well as possible and all sitting practices need energy to keep up the mindfulness required to do them. When you first start sitting and strive to practise meditation, your energy and mindfulness are depleted at a faster rate than they are in more experienced meditators. As a beginner you spend a lot of energy learning what to do and not to do. Conditioned patterns of behaviour which are not conducive to the practice require a lot of effort to detect and correct. Once you know what you are supposed to do, and have developed proper ways and means, the practice itself requires much less energy. As you gain experience, energy lasts longer and mindfulness stays stronger and fuller. For

these reasons, walking, the main method of developing energy and mindfulness during meditation retreats, should be adjusted to suit progress in the practice. [22]

Before discussing the different ways to walk between sits, it should be understood that there are different types of meditation practices which dictate the structure incorporated within the walking. In the Theravādin school of Buddhism there are two types of mental development: *Samatha* and *Vipassanā*. *Samatha*, usually translated as tranquillity, is a synonym for concentration; it is usually used to denote the development of strong concentration, known as *jhānas*, which allow absorption into the object of contemplation. *Vipassanā* means insight; it is a synonym for wisdom, and at the height of development has the penetrative ability to make clear the three characteristics of any phenomena perceived (unsatisfactoriness, impermanence, and selflessness). When used together, tranquillity leads to greater penetrative strength for insight, creating the synergy mentioned earlier. [23]

The previous discussion on walking mindfully when not in a retreat describes primarily a tranquillity practice. During a retreat, both types of walking may be used. I shall revisit tranquillity walking as part of a retreat but first I wish to describe walking as part of an insight practice. The guidelines in this section take into account length of practice, type of practice, and the transition between practices designed for *Vipassanā* development and practices designed to produce *Samatha*.

## Insight Walking

One of the most common insight practices may be found in the Mahāsi Vipassanā meditation from Burma. [24] There are other variations on Vipassanā meditation, and other Burmese Vipassanā schools, but it serves no useful purpose here to get into differences. Instead, what should be gleaned is the way mindfulness is developed with the walk for the benefit of any sitting practice.

The most common way to practise insight walking is to mentally label the actions and thoughts that arise while walking. Insight walking requires a reflexive placing of the mind, or attention, upon whatever is occupying the meditator's awareness in each moment. The placing of the mind is immediately followed by a directed knowing, or marking, of exactly what it is that is currently occupying the meditator's attention.

You "mark" the awareness with a short mental note, or label, to clearly identify the action or thought process currently present. The practice requires you to know that you are walking when doing so, but that when your attention leaves the bottom of your feet, you know where your attention has gone. And of course, you can only "know" when you come to realise the mind is no longer on the feet and has become occupied with something else. With repeated practice, you can gain the ability to see the mind taking another object as soon as it leaves the object of focus, in this case the feet.

However, no matter how long you practise this exercise or how skilled you become, it will always be a case of “when” the mind leaves your object of awareness and never a matter of “if”. It is the nature of the mind to investigate whatever arises at a sense door. So abandon any notion of stopping the mind from doing what it does naturally. The job is to watch the mind, not change the mind. Future frustration can be avoided if this point is clear from the beginning. It is also important not to become dismayed at first sight of the level of detail a matured practice of insight requires. Meditation practice should grow gradually and steadily at the pace natural to the meditator. There is no mandated deadline.

To start, you first note the intention to walk by marking the thought as “intending”. If you are sitting, then you will next note the preparation or planning to get up with “planning” or “preparing”. The moving of a limb is marked with the mental noting of “moving” and the placing of a hand for balance as “placing”. The moving of the other arm is again marked as “moving” or “reaching” and its placement as “placing”. Shifting your weight onto your hands is marked as “shifting”. If you bend your arm, mark it as “bending”. In the same manner mark all actions required for rising to a standing position. This will not be a fluid and continuous motion, but instead will require you to break the action into parts and reflect upon each action-part to determine what to label it. Fully finish the act of marking before proceeding to the next action or thought. Catch everything you can,



including all “intending” so that you clearly see each part of the overall task of standing before and as it’s attempted.

Here is a list of potential labels which could be used to mark the actions and thoughts you might be aware of when moving from sitting to standing in this manner: intending, planning, preparing, looking, moving, bending, placing, shifting, pushing, straightening, reaching, grasping, pulling, releasing, balancing, stretching, arching. The list is far from exhaustive, so feel free to use whatever comes to mind when doing this practice of insight marking. If thoughts and feelings enter your mind concerning the task then take a moment to note them also with labels such as: reacting, complaining, elation, hoping, wishing, planning, and worrying. If you recognise states of mind, then mark them as well with labels such as: frustrated, sad, happy, agitated, groggy, clear minded, slothful (laziness, indolence), torpid (sluggish, rigid), bright, sharp, and slow.

Do not get overwhelmed by the quantity of examples. Again, these are possibilities which you may or may not see and utilise. I list them to show just how much potential detail may be possible to mark mentally. At first, start by marking what comes to mind and increase marking as more and more becomes evident. You may even get to the point of seeing the intention before each action is started and become able to mark many intentions.

Once you have finished the action of standing, bring your mind to the top of your head. Now move your awareness

down through your entire body knowing you are standing. Do this while simultaneously making a mental mark three times slowly, “standing, standing, standing”. By the time you finish the third mental mark of “standing” your awareness should be at the bottom of the feet. If you are starting your walk from a standing position, [25] then do this to establish mindfully that you are standing before taking a step. If something happens which interrupts your marking and you lose awareness of the process, then give up marking the “standing” and instead mark the new object which has now become the present object of focus. After marking, do nothing more with it. You simply move your awareness back to the top of the head and start the marking of “standing” three times again. Repeat as necessary until you finish standing.

Start your walk with the right foot. [26] As you lift it, mentally mark the action as “lifting”. As you move the foot forward, mark it as “moving” and when you place the foot, mark it as “placing”. The heel of the foot you have moved should land no further than the ball of your other foot. If you try to take a longer step, you will lose your balance at some point, so set the distance now and stick to it. As you shift your weight prior to taking the next step with your left foot, mark “shifting” as you shift your weight. Repeat the process of marking “lifting, moving, placing, shifting” with your left foot. Keep marking in this manner until your attention has left your feet.

When you become aware your attention has wandered, stop

walking. In the same manner as previously described, mark where the mind is and what it is doing at that moment with a mental note. If your foot is in mid-air, then put it down. Do not try and balance on one foot while marking or you will lose your balance. If you do try to quickly mark while balancing, and start to fall over, and remember what I said, do mark “remembering” after you regain your balance. You can also mark the “laughing” or “giggling” at yourself if and when that occurs.

When the mind leaves the soles of the feet, it has gone to one of the sense doors. If you catch it right away then you can mark this as simply hearing, seeing, touching, tasting, smelling, thinking. But, if your awareness is not that quick (and often it will not be), then mark what the mind is doing at the moment you become aware of it. Do not attempt to track down when the mind left the feet or what the mind has been doing since it left the feet. If you slip into this cognitive trap, then mark it as “remembering” or “searching” instead. After you have marked what your attention was upon with a mental note or label, bring your attention back to the feet and start the “lifting, moving, placing, shifting” with the foot that is ready to take the next step. With practice, a single action of marking where the mind is or what the mind is doing will be sufficient for returning the attention to the bottom of the feet to take the next step.

Repeated practice of insight walking will reveal the number of movements required to walk are much greater than

previously realised. Your first attempts to see each step in four parts soon leads to seeing the intentions that precede each action. Some will see even more actions involved in parts of each step, such as “lifting heel and lifting toes” and “placing heel and placing toes.” Resist breaking the walk into more parts in order to mark more. There is little benefit to taking the marking further than the “lifting, moving, placing, shifting” and it can lead to increased frustration from the extra strain. Instead watch all the actions as they occur within each mental knowing of “lifting” using only the label of “lifting” to denote the whole sequence of the rising foot after the intention has been noticed and marked. Likewise use a knowing and grouping together for any other actions seen within “moving” and “placing” the foot, or for the host of actions involved in shifting the weight of the body before taking the next step.

At times you will become aware of a mind state such as agitation or joyfulness, or a physically manifesting state like pain or sleepiness. Treat such occurrences in the same way as mental objects: stop and label them accordingly before returning to the bottom of the feet to resume walking. For example, when you become aware of a painful sensation, first stop, then simply mark “pain” or “painful” without further examination before returning to the feet to resume walking. “Without further examination” means refraining from trying to determine the origin of the pain or from contemplating doing something about it. Only if the pain persists past a few noticing-and-markings, should the

meditator stop walking and mindfully contemplate the pain. Often such single-minded examination will result in the pain disappearing as a knowable phenomenon and the walk can be taken up again. If the pain does not disappear, then it is prudent to change posture a little to relieve the painful sensation before returning to the feet to resume walking again.

But be careful not to give in too easily here. I have seen meditators develop a pattern of repeatedly changing their posture only to have the pain continue to bother them or even intensify because they were too quick on altering the practice. Personally, I went through a number of retreats in which I kept changing how I carried my arms in an attempt to deal with pain in my shoulders and lower back. I would clasp my hands behind my back, then cross them in front of me, and then let them hang down. I would keep doing this constant altering throughout the entire walk. I finally tired of having to wrestle with the pain for entire retreats and settled on the choice of leaving the arms always at my side. It took a few walks to break the conditioned pattern of reacting. When I caught myself moving the arms, I put them back at my side. Eventually I was able to mark the intention and desire to move the arms without doing the action. After a couple of days both the pain and the habit of moving the arms ceased.

Pain is probably the most dramatic example for many, but general mind states such as agitation, worry, anger and their opposites such as calm, tranquillity, joy, may present

themselves strongly enough to be noticed and marked accordingly. Repeated marking and letting go will eventually result in the mind not returning to phenomena handled in this manner. By this process the mind will become calmer, learning to refrain from continually returning to these states.

On occasions the mind may seem to be less compliant and will not stay at the feet for any length of time. The mind may seem to dart back to a previous thought or object, or may seem to not re-establish on the feet when placed there. When this happens, repeat the mental marking of what is entertaining the mind three times slowly as you simultaneously re-establish the attention upon the soles of your feet. If this doesn't work then you may have to take a closer look at what you are using as a label to mark where the mind has gone or what the mind is doing. When the marking is too general or non-specific, the mind may not let go of the object that is the source of attraction. Nor will the mind return easily or remain upon the intended object of concentration. For instance, if using the label "thinking" doesn't work then look a little deeper and see if you are planning, speculating, projecting, etc. Use a different label that is more specific, then re-establish the mind upon the soles of the feet, and take another step. Be aware and mark if you start "looking" for the very object you just finished marking and thereby causing a returning to that object. Just keep at it and the mind will eventually become more pliant, allowing you to remain attentive on the soles of your feet for

longer periods of time. Or, at the very least, you will gain a better understanding of what exactly it is that is exerting such an effect on the mind.

When you reach the end of your walk and take the last step, mark “stopping” three times. Do this slowly so you fill your mind with non-movement. Then start turning to the left, keeping your awareness on the bottom of your feet. Keep the feet close together, heels almost touching, swivel on your heels and mark “turning” three times as you take three sets of left-right combination steps to make a 180 degree turn. Add another left-right combination step if the turn is more than 180 degrees. The amount of detail here is provided to make sure that you complete this action in small steps so that you keep your balance. If your mind leaves the feet during the turn, stop. Mark where or what the mind is doing. Return your attention to the bottom of your feet, and then continue the turn where you left off. After completing the turn, bring your awareness to the top of your head and mark “standing” three times as you bring the awareness down through your body before starting off again on the right foot.

Walk in this manner, continually marking where the mind is until the end of the allotted time. The distance between turns should be somewhere between 5–6 metres (16–20 feet), but this distance can be a less for insight walking. I would recommend a minimum of 15 minutes for an insight walk, and somewhere between 45 minutes to an hour as optimum to develop mindfulness before or between sits. You may

also alter your direction or incorporate a diverging path to your seat. Just mark accordingly, meaning the “intention” if you catch it, “turning” and “going” to note the change in direction, and “stopping” when you reach the spot where you plan to stop.

A sit should follow immediately after the walk or you will lose some or all of the mindfulness built-up during the walk. You should also use full awareness and marking in the process of sitting down following the walk. The instruction for getting up from sitting at the beginning of this section is reversed. But after you have completed all the motions, movements and marking required to sit, bring your awareness to the top of your head. In the same manner as was done for standing, mark “sitting” three times as you bring your awareness down through your body knowing that you are sitting.

You are now ready to start your sitting meditation with considerably increased mindfulness. If you were sitting before you started the walk you will notice both an increase in your mindfulness and in your energy as you start the next sit. As you sit and practise your meditation, awareness becomes less keen as time passes and your energy is again depleted. For beginners I recommend no more than an hour of sitting practice without a walk. As your practice becomes more advanced you will find that you can sit longer before the awareness and energy have become depleted to the point of requiring a walk. You will also find that it takes less time with the walk to increase your mindfulness sufficiently



to sit again. But don't be too hasty to change. As you work more and more with the insight walk you will know when the awareness has reached its full potential and using set time periods will no longer be required. When you reach this point, walk only as needed.

## **Changing the Insight Walk**

You will know when awareness has reached full potential when it is what I call "brittle awareness." It is like reacting to a soft sound with a fright, a jump, as when you are startled or surprised by a voice when you are unaware another person is present. If you are reaching this level of awareness after 30–45 minutes of insight walking on a consistent basis, then it's time to change your walk. Instead of marking "lifting, moving, placing, shifting" as you walk, change to "walking, walking" with the label of walking coinciding with each full step. After a few walks to get accustomed to the different method of marking, the development of mindfulness will be just as much as before but not so "brittle" as to make you jump from sounds. You still mark whatever the mind is doing or where it has gone when it leaves the feet as before, only the marking of the "lifting, moving, placing, shifting" has been changed.

As you practise insight walking marking "walking, walking" as described above, you will start to catch more and more intentions preceding actions and thoughts. You may glean the "in-sight" that an intention precedes every action and that the act of intending is a separate action from

the action following the intention. With repeated practice it is quite possible to develop a loop of seeing intentions. Specifically, as an intention to mark is seen, another intention arises to mark the intention to mark, leading to a series of “intending, intending, intending”. If you have developed the practice to this stage, and not everyone does, then you may have to drop the act of mental noting completely. At this level of awareness the meditator’s practice becomes a simple knowing where the mind has gone and what it is doing without attaching any labels. Upon realisation that the mind has left the object, the meditator looks and knows where the mind is and what it is doing, then returns to the object. A label is no longer used to denote any part of the walk, but awareness of the entire walk is maintained. The walk stops when something other than the walk has gained one’s attention and the walk resumes when one’s attention is returned to the feet.

As long as the meditation being practised is insight-based, then no further changes to the walk are necessary (other than shortening the period of the walk and lengthening the periods of sitting as mentioned earlier). However, if there is a shift to a tranquillity-based meditation, then the walk should change to be more conducive to the new method of contemplation.

This paper will now move back towards tranquillity walking, by describing an intermediate walking practice that is quite helpful.

## A Gentle Shift from Insight Walking

When doing insight walking, you are developing what is called momentary-concentration, whereby the goal is to observe the arising and passing away of all phenomena. Although this is exactly what you want to develop for Vipassanā meditation practices, it is not conducive for retreats where the aim is to develop samādhi [27] to the point of jhāna. [28] When doing a daily practice with a short walk between sits, insight walking will probably be all you need to develop. But if you are in a retreat where the aim is developing serenity (another term for *samādhi*), the insight walk should only be used at the beginning of the retreat to establish a high level of mindfulness. Once this is achieved, switch to methods that develop and sustain concentration for longer periods of time. This requires dropping the use of labels as well as stopping any investigations where the attention has gone. Such a sudden shift in technique can be quite harsh and it may take a few days to recover from what feels like lost ground. Some teachers of jhāna promote using only a tranquillity-based walk rather than an insight walk to avoid this potential problem in the retreat. But tranquillity walks take longer to develop mindfulness to the same degree that is possible in a relatively shorter period with the insight walk.

There is another method of walking meditation that works very well when changing from insight to tranquillity walking. It is still a form of insight walking, but it replaces the labels of “lifting, moving, placing, shifting” with

concepts characteristic of the four primary elements: Fire, Air, Earth, and Water. [29] The mind is broken from reliance upon the conditioned pattern of behaviour (previously marking labels), but is still filled with enough work to help keep it engaged.

The meditator starts by seeing the characteristic of the primary element in each of the four stages. The fire element as it heats causes lightness and lifting which corresponds to the lifting of the foot. The feeling along the bottom of the foot as it moves corresponds to the movement of the air element. Placing the foot on the ground or floor is compared to the solidity of earth. Finally, the ways muscles and flesh give way to the shifting weight is representative to the oozing characteristic of water. Thereby, all four elements are represented while walking. [30]

It takes only a few steps to get the knack of dropping the labels of “lifting, moving, placing, shifting”, to Fire, Air, Earth, and Water, and substituting with concepts derived from the elements’ characteristics. At the same time you also let go of marking when the mind wanders off. When you realise the mind is no longer on the bottom of the feet, simply return to the bottom of the feet. No further investigation is done upon any other phenomena arising during the course of the practice.

So, again and more specifically, as the foot rises up, single out the quality of the rising movement and the lightness of the foot which are both characteristic of things that are

heated. This essence of the element of fire is then seen as a process in the walk and not just a concept. In similar fashion, a primary characteristic of Air is movement, so seeing the movement of the foot as the essence of the Air element follows. Touching of the foot to the ground brings out the solidity of the Earth element essence. The essence of the Water element is that it flows out from under things pressed onto it. This process is readily perceived as the full weight of the foot presses down and you feel the muscles and flesh adjust. As you keep walking, the four parts you are focusing upon become filled with new perceptions of the four elements. As stated before, no words are formed, but the mind is nonetheless filled with the watching. When some thought or other stimuli arises to take you away from your observation, you simply let go without further contemplation and return to observing the process of the elements occurring within the walk.

As is often pointed out, “As a thing is viewed, so it appears.” [31] The first time I did this meditation I was struck by how easily the concepts were abandoned and replaced with seeing the process. Sayādaw U Silānanda states, “By paying close attention to these four stages of walking meditation, the four elements in their true essence are perceived, not merely as concepts, but as actual processes, as ultimate realities.” Later he adds, “Only those who practise can ever hope to see these things.” So do not give in to doubt, but have faith. Work to surmount the concept and see the process only. It will come if you keep

trying.

This walking meditation bridges the gap between Insight and Tranquillity practice because it breaks the yoke of momentary-concentration that was developed through investigating every stimulus noticed. The break is achieved by striving to remain upon a single object and not examining phenomena anywhere else. The concentration builds upon the single object and the mind tends to stay on the object rather than wandering off.

This meditation walk using the elements can still be seen as an Insight practice because continued practice will lead to seeing the four elements comprising everything.

Impermanence, perceived through the rise and fall of phenomena is now joined by seeing the body as non-unitary with elemental processes. This knowledge leaves no support for a concept of self. The concept of no-self is the third component of the first Noble Truth of Buddhism which describes all possible phenomena as inherently unsatisfactory, impermanent, and not-self.

## **Tranquillity Walking**

The intermediate practice of the elemental walk between insight walking and tranquillity walking should help maintain the mindfulness gained from the insight work without requiring marking. For most meditators, a day of practising the elemental walk while in retreat is generally enough time to stop marking without affecting the ability to gain mindfulness in one's walk. Even though the object has

changed from developing Vipassanā to developing Samatha, the need for mindfulness remains. The intermediate practice of the elemental walk between insight walking and tranquillity walking should help maintain the mindfulness gained from the insight work without requiring marking. The walk now becomes very similar to the non-retreat walking described at the beginning of the paper, but I shall repeat the instruction and add more relevance where necessary, because this is a retreat and not a walk in the park, so to speak.

To begin tranquillity walking, the meditator simply maintains awareness of bodily movements. This includes knowing that you are walking, that you have stopped walking, that you are turning, that you are sitting down or getting up. Without using any form of marking you simply remain aware of all the motions needed to complete the action. For example, when you stop at the end of your walk, before you turn, feel the sensation of not moving or the lack of motion now that you have come to the end, but do not mark “stopping.” Be aware of the shifting of the body and moving of the feet to do the turn, but again do not mark “turning.” Before you start to walk again, bring awareness to the top of your head. Bring it down through your body fully experiencing the sensation of standing, but do not mentally mark it as “standing”, just know it. When the mind wanders off to another object, stop the physical action. Knowing the mind is not where it is supposed to be is the extent of the investigation. Upon knowing, bring the mind

back to the feet and strive to maintain awareness on the feet only. This process is repeated countless times without any marking or labelling of the mind objects, states of mind, or of any other physical activities and sensations. Do not worry about how long the mind stays on the feet or on the walking. The constant bringing of the attention back to the feet will eventually train the mind to stay focused for longer and longer periods of time.

The length of the walk should not be less than 5 metres (16 feet) or development of concentration and tranquillity will be impeded. Walks of 7–8 metres (20–24 feet) would be better. Length was not as important for the insight walking because extended concentration upon an object was not the aim. With the longer walk, there is more opportunity to develop concentration or one-pointedness before stopping and turning. If necessary, the walk may be circular or in a figure eight to gain greater distance, but it is generally a good idea to have a turning point in order to make sure that the mind is not running on for lengthy periods. This is more of a problem if the practice slips into an automatic mode.

The length of time for the tranquillity walk may be increased if necessary. The pace or speed of the walk will probably increase a little, but do not make it so. Let the pace come naturally, as you strive to be aware of the bottom of the feet. Only stop walking when you realise your attention has already left the feet. [32] If you catch the intention of the mind to leave the bottom of the foot but do not act upon the intention, then you have not lost the object and you do not



have to stop the walk. As the ability to concentrate for extended periods of time increases, the hindrances are suppressed more and more and the jhāna factors [33] appear. Feelings of tranquillity, happiness, and concentration may increase. Resist reacting when these feelings or states are noticed; renew and maintain “awareness without marking” on the feet and on all other activities. At this stage, the length of time required to develop and maintain both faculties of mindfulness and energy may be determined on a per-walk basis, but do not cut the walk too short or the concentration in the sit will wane prematurely.

## **Benefits of the Practice**

The benefits of walking as a meditation practice, whether in or out of retreat, have been shown to be an increase in mindfulness, energy, and concentration. These three are included in the factors of enlightenment [34] needed for ultimate success on the spiritual path. Although walking meditation has benefits that work for both Vipassanā and Samatha practices, it also has a developmental role for attaining jhāna. Walking, as a part of a tranquillity meditation practice, helps to bring forward and intensify the two jhāna factors of Applied and Sustained thought. The focusing of your attention on the feet and remaining there leads to an initial arising of these two jhāna factors which will strengthen the more they are practised.

Skilful use of walking meditation develops and maintains

the mindfulness necessary in jhāna work. It is a great aid when trying to reach the razor edge of balance between opposing states as described in the Golden Mean:

Neither too energetically nor too sluggishly  
Neither too tensely nor too loosely  
Neither too rapidly nor too slowly  
Neither too much determination nor too little  
And with attention that is neither strained nor slack.

There are five faculties to be developed if one wishes to make gains on the spiritual path: Faith, Investigation, Concentration, Energy, and Mindfulness. Mindfulness cannot be overly developed and more is always better, but the first four must be developed in a balanced manner or development will stall until balance is restored. Energy and concentration must be matched for either to work properly. The skill of balancing here is very important and very subtle. When energy outstrips concentration, the result is agitation as the mind bolts from its object with the unrestrained power of energy. In the opposite case, the mind sinks into lethargy and dullness and ends up wandering away. Concentration focuses and disciplines energy, while energy fuels concentration enabling it to remain steadfast and bright.

Practising walking meditation in daily life outside of formal retreats extends the benefits gained from retreats. It can also go a long way in helping you prepare for future retreats. Once you get accustomed to it, walking meditation is

adaptable to different physical activities and allows you to combine exercise, mantra work, and breath meditation. Incorporating at least 15–30 minutes of such activity every day aids your spiritual development.

Many teachers and writers of Dhamma books offer similar ways to practise mindfulness outside of formal retreats. No one can predict how long it takes to realise Nibbāna, what practices are going to be required, nor whether it will happen inside or outside of retreat. However when it happens, it will be when mindfulness is present as much as is possible. Therefore it follows that developing mindfulness should be front and centre of your spiritual work. As such, it can be said that the practice of walking meditation could be one of the most valuable exercises that you could ever do.

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# Notes

1. *Pacchāpuresaññā*, which is mentioned in SN 51:11 & 20 as a perception done when developing the *iddhipadas*. Cf. AN 3:89 where this and similar perceptions, said to be limitless concentration (*appamāṇasamādhi*), lead to overcoming the (spatial and temporal) directions (*disā*) or polarities. It seems related to the *ariya-iddhis*, noble powers, whereby the *sekha* transcends the repulsive and unrepulsive polarity (D III 112, M III 301, S V 119). However, here *pacchāpuresaññā* could simply mean keeping attention confined to the walking path.
2. *Path of Purification* III,103.
3. *Path of Purification* III,104
4. *Path of Purification* III,105, VIII,245f
5. *Path of Purification* III,105, VII,115
6. The other 3 postures are standing, sitting, and lying down (see MN 119).
7. Namely: Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana. The teachings of all three schools are built upon the development of mindfulness, and walking meditation is often an integral part of that development.
8. Nibbāna, or Nirvāna in Sanskrit, literally means “extinction” and “is the highest and ultimate goal of all

Buddhist aspirations” (*Buddhist Dictionary*, p. 125). The tendency to use the word “enlightenment” as a synonym is diminishing amongst Theravādin Buddhist authors because it has been overused and is considered too broad in scope to be a proper definition for what can only be understood after the experience.

9. Bare attention is perception of the initial arising of any phenomena before subsequent reaction or further development is undertaken. It is the starting point for knowing, shaping, and liberating the mind. Clear comprehension builds upon bare attention, determining a course of action or reaction to the initial arising of any phenomena. Clear comprehension is like a sieve that lets pass only that which fits the desired purpose and which is the most suitable given perceived choices. It brings into focus all aspects of daily life as objects for development of mindfulness, and when practiced correctly, rejects all that is not in accord with one’s spiritual aspirations. For more on this see *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation* pp. 30–56.
10. Conversely, judgments and comparisons leading to such positive thoughts as “I am doing better today” or “The practice is going well” are also extraneous. Let go of all attachments and aversions associated with the practice; work with what “is” rather than what “could be” or what “was”. Leave off such dissections until you have completed the exercise itself, which is the only time such an action is of benefit to meditation.

11. The use of the term “stuff” is not idiomatic. It is meant as a conveyance of attitude or approach; a way to quickly perceive extraneous mental activity as not being worthy of further analysis beyond bare recognition before turning away from it back towards the walking itself.
12. It should be noted that in Buddhism the mind is considered to be a sense that results in cognition, in the same fashion as the other bodily sensations of seeing, hearing, smelling, touching, and tasting.
13. Using the count of 5–10–15–20 instead of 1–2–3–4 is a matter of individual preference, but it may be of benefit for those who get attached to quantity rather than quality. The former method of counting doesn’t lend emphasis to quantity.
14. This cannot be overstated. If you have trouble separating volition and attention, whereby you cannot simply watch the breath without controlling it, then counting and breathing may be counterproductive. Speak to your teacher if problems persist or switch to a different walking practice (see next section on Enhancing the Practice).
15. For instance in oral presentations, speeches, meetings, etc.
16. A description of this alternative method is in “Daizong's Magic Walking Technique and Qigong.” By Lan Blan. *Internal Arts*, Vol. 3, No. 6, November, 1988, p. 38.

17. Not only Theravādin mantras may be used; any mantra that is designed to encourage positive mind states will work. For example, the *Vajraguru Mantra* from the Vajrayana School produces a sense of well-being when chanted and also increases energy.
18. Thich Nhat Hanh points out that once you have been doing the practice of walking meditation for awhile you can try (for a few breaths) to take slightly more air into your lungs and even extend the exhale (pp 22–23 in *The Long Road Turns To Joy*), but I urge caution here for the reasons mentioned earlier.
19. The term “wholesome” means that which is profitable for your meditation practice, or for your spiritual development. Use clear comprehension to determine suitability of potential phrases or behaviours.
20. The ability for the mind to alternate between tasks so quickly that it appears to be doing two or more things at the same time is what is meant by “running on automatic.” The challenge of working with an odd numbered word or syllable count requires sustained attention upon the exercise or you will lose track of the steps, the breath, or the sentence being used.
21. Joy and tranquillity are factors to be developed, but not at the expense of concentration. Such states are indicators that wholesome states are indeed arising, but taking them as an object to develop further while doing walking meditation is counterproductive. Indulging leads to more



and more discursive thinking, or to seeing yet more similar phenomena. This is sense desire clinging rather than a letting go.

22. Advanced meditators are sufficiently aware of changes in energy and mindfulness that they walk when they perceive the need to and sit for longer periods between walks than beginners. They are able to perceive how long they need to walk to reach the levels of energy and mindfulness required to maximize the potential of their sitting practice. The time required for each walk and each sit is determined through mindful introspection and not by a prescribed schedule. But prescribed schedules for walking and sitting are beneficial for beginners and should not be abandoned too quickly.
23. *Buddhist Dictionary* p 186 is the main source for the explanation here, but the two types of development are not utilized by all meditation teachers. As well, some meditators are unable to develop jhāna and use only insight meditation practices.
24. Two excellent short texts detailing the practice of this form of Vipassanā meditation are Mahāsi Sayādaw's *Practical Insight Meditation* and *Satipaṭṭhāna Vipassanā* (p. 38 has a brief description on walking).
25. For example, you have just finished the dishes and are now going to start walking.
26. Why do I recommend the right foot? I made the decision after contemplating two other points in the

practice of Insight meditation: which way to turn at the end of the walk and which side to sleep on. Since turning left is the same direction one turns something to undo it (e.g. the lid of a jar), I thought that turning that way in the walk could be suggestive of undoing conditioning. Starting on the right foot and sleeping on the right side while practicing meditation is utilizing the suggestive quality of “rightness” like “Right Mindfulness” in the “Eightfold Noble Path.” As such, my recommendations in this matter are not mandatory, but stay with your choice once made. It is never a good idea to keep changing back and forth on such matters.

27. *Samādhi* in this context means mental one-pointedness or mental unification of the wholesome kind.
28. *Jhānas* are “states of deep mental unification characterized by a total immersion of the mind in its object. They result from the centring of the mind upon a single object with such a degree of attention that the discursive activity of thought is slowed down and eventually stopped.” (*The Path of Serenity and Insight*, pp 3–4.)
29. See *The Benefits of Walking Meditation* by Sayādaw U Silānanda.
30. The original elemental walking, derived from the commentary to the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, uses the following combinations: lifting-fire, moving-air, lowering the foot-water, pressing the foot onto the ground-earth. I have

altered this meditation, using water instead to emphasize the shifting of the body between placing and lifting. I believe that the original elemental walk is more conducive to momentary-concentration, which is the aim of Insight meditations. The variation of the elemental walk presented here, by being more fluid, is, I believe, more conducive to developing absorption concentration, which is the aim of Tranquillity meditations.

31. Evans-Wentz's *The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation*, page 232.
32. This is different from the instruction giving under non-retreat walking. There is no mention there of stopping the walk when the mind wanders from the soles of your feet. The time constraints when walking to work, etc., do not tolerate a lot of stop and go. As well, the onslaught of stimuli is much greater and the ability to resist such stimuli is not as developed as it would be by this point in a retreat.
33. The jhāna factors are mental formations which increase in intensity as the mental hindrances are suppressed. In the first jhāna they are: Applied thought, sustained thought, rapture, bliss, and one-pointedness. The jhāna factors are not the jhāna itself but mental constituents that have increased in intensity beyond normal levels. When these five factors have reached the degree of intensity needed for jhāna, then first jhāna occurs. There are a number of elements, or mental phenomena, that comprise

jhāna beside the five mentioned here (up to sixty mental states may be present for first jhāna according to the Dhammasaṅgaṇī of the Abhidhamma, but other sources remove repetitions to reduce the number down to around thirty-three, see *The Path of Serenity and Insight*, p. 69).

**34.** A translation of *bojjhaṅga* (see *Buddhist Dictionary*, p 42).

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